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PART I

Secret U.S. Military Aid for Afghan Rebels Approved

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WASHINGTON—House and Senate committees have approved a large secret military aid program for anti-Soviet rebels in Afghanistan, moving the package through the final step in the funding process, congressional sources said Wednesday.

The money, apparently near \$200 million, dwarfs the controversial non-lethal aid package for anti-government rebels in Nicaragua and brought questions from some members of Congress over what it would be used for, though there was no sign of significant opposition.

Congress approved \$27 million in aid to the Nicaraguan *contras* (rebels) after a drawn-out, public battle with President Reagan, and that money has begun flowing to the anti-Sandinista forces.

No announcement was made of the action on the Afghanistan

funding, which was taken recently, or of the specific amount of money to be made available to the rebels through the CIA. A variety of aid programs funded by the United States, China and Saudi Arabia are expected to provide the rebels with \$400 million this year.

"There are continuing questions about where it goes," one congressional source said of the money approved in Congress. "What are the objectives and goals? We're not about to sign a blank check. We're talking about lots of money."

The Muslim rebels are "putting up a helluva fight, and they deserve some support," he said. But the source, speaking on the condition that he not be named, said he did not expect the funding to grow beyond that approved in recent weeks by the House and Senate

defense and intelligence committees.

The rebels, often beset by disunity, poor equipment and a lack of medical assistance, have been fighting Soviet troops since December, 1979, when Moscow sent its forces into Afghanistan. According to the latest estimates, about 115,000 Soviet troops are believed to be in Afghanistan fighting in support of the Communist government of President Babrak Karmal. The guerrilla troops reportedly shuttle between rural Afghan villages and refugee camps

across the border in Pakistan.

In recent weeks, major fighting has been reported in southeastern Afghanistan as Soviet troops tried to seal guerrilla supply routes.

Tanks Against Small Arms

The Soviets use heavy tanks, sophisticated helicopters, gunships and MIG warplanes against the rebels' mountain hideouts. The guerrillas are armed with relatively small weapons.

"They're not fighting tanks with tanks," the congressional source said, adding that the rebels are defending themselves with "fairly

rudimentary, basic small arms."

He indicated that the funding would help buy anti-aircraft missiles and anti-tank weapons, though the rebels' best assault efforts employ "demolition charges."

The money approved by Congress would be "spread out over a period of time," he said.

Decisions on the funding were so closely held that few congressional committee staff members were involved in the discussions, stepping in only when their areas of expertise were on the table, sources said.

The funding, reportedly part of an annual appropriation being made available to the anti-Soviet faction, was first reported in the Wall Street Journal. The money was originally included in other secret measures but was "re-programmed" for use by the rebels in a step that does not require further congressional action.